

Name of Project: Georgia's Self-Determination Program for Family Caregivers

Name of Organization: Georgia Division of Aging Services
Atlanta, GA

Principle of Choices for Independence: Consumer Direction

Description:

The Georgia Division of Aging Services was awarded a three-year National Family Caregiver Support Program innovations grant in 2001 from the U.S. Administration on Aging to develop and evaluate self-directed voucher care projects for family caregivers of the non-Medicaid older population in rural areas of the state. Currently, there are four consumer-directed programs for family caregivers (which are known as "self-directed care" programs in Georgia) in 59 counties (37 % of the state's counties), representing rural communities, mountain regions, and urban and mid-sized cities.

Consumer-Direction Process: The services available from each of the state's four current programs for family caregivers include respite (i.e., in-home care, adult day care) and supplemental services including but not limited to: yard work/chore services, home modifications/repair, consumable supplies, low-tech assistive devices/adaptive equipment, and personal care services including homemaker services and hair cuts.

Outcomes/Benefits: One of the goals of the state's self-determination program was to evaluate the program's effectiveness by comparing results to those receiving services through the traditional service delivery system. Research results demonstrate that the consumer-directed program has provided a real safety net, especially for low-income caregivers living in rural areas, where consumers have access to a smaller number and more narrow range of community-based services. Caregivers reported financial, physical and emotional relief, the ability to provide better care, and the ability to keep their older relatives at home and out of institutional settings.

Self-directed caregivers were more likely to report that they were "very satisfied" with services than caregivers receiving traditional services (82% vs. 64%). The ability to hire friends, family members and neighbors may have contributed to self-directed caregivers' increased overall satisfaction with services. A large percentage (81%) said that they preferred to hire someone they knew as opposed to hiring a stranger from an agency. In addition, compared to traditional service users who lived in rural areas, rural self-directed caregivers were significantly more satisfied with overall services.¹

Georgia's Self-Determination Program has published a Self-Directed Guide Book that details how to develop a consumer-directed program for caregivers. The guidebook can be obtained on the Division's website (<http://aging.dhr.georgia.gov>).

Georgia has been actively providing technical assistance and information to other states seeking to implement similar consumer directed programs for family caregivers. The key to their success has been the willingness of the aging community to experiment and trust that the consumer will use the funds judiciously. Caregiver satisfaction has borne this out.

For more information about Georgia's Self-Determination Program for Family Caregivers, please contact Cliff Burt at 404-657-5336 or by email: gcburt@dhr.state.ga.us The Website for the Georgia Department of Human Resources is <http://www.dhr.state.ga.us>